

WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny Hoyer released the following statement today in recognition of the 34th celebration of Earth Day, which will be observed on Thursday, April 22.

"The first Earth Day, celebrated on April 22, 1970, marks the beginning of the modern day environmental movement. We have come a long way in the past thirty-four years. Our oceans, rivers, and lakes are cleaner, and our parks and our protected open spaces are more vast. Yet much remains to be done.

"Over the last 34 years, many important programs have been established to help not only clean up our environment, but make a lasting impact on our children's health by ensuring that the water they drink and the air they breathe is safe and clean. By making a consistent investment in reasonable and responsible policies to protect the Earth, we can ensure a happy and healthy lifestyle for our children and grandchildren.

"Regrettably, Congress passed a budget this year that devastates critical federal funding for environmental protection programs by rolling back essential funds for the nation's most important programs, including the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act. These programs would make important investments in cleaning our air, ensuring that our citizens have safe drinking water, and cleaning up hazardous waste.

"In stark contrast, I supported a budget alternative that demonstrated a long-standing commitment to environmental conservation, protection and preservation programs and would have aided in developing additional programs to protect our precious resources. The budget I supported would have provided an additional \$3.6 billion over the budget we passed for fiscal year 2004 and over \$40 billion more over the next ten years for environmental protection and public lands management. These programs play an important role in keeping our environment and our people healthy.

"The health of our environment is a direct result of our commitment to its protection and preservation. In Congress, I have worked hard to secure federal funding to protect Maryland's natural and historical resources. I am honored that the League of Conservation Voters has once again recognized my support for environmental issues in their annual scorecard this year.

"I feel strongly that we have an obligation to protect the Chesapeake Bay. While the Bay and its tributaries are cleaner now than they were several decades ago, the clean-up challenges are becoming harder to meet. In fact, coastal water conditions in the Northeast fell from fair to poor in the last three years. I am proud to have helped secure more than \$30 million in federal funds this year to support key programs like the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Chesapeake Bay Restoration effort. This effort supports crucial initiatives like the Oyster Recovery Project and the Aquatic Nuisance Species Prevention and Control, which research and implement scientific projects critical to the health of the Bay. I will continue to work to improve the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, including the Anacostia and Potomac Rivers, by fighting for increased funding for Bay Small Watershed grants, oyster habitats and recovery, and minimizing the flow of nutrients into our waterways.

"Maryland continues to lose open space at a faster rate than neighboring states. I have been dedicated to preserving our natural resources by working to ensure that we are able to preserve our parks and open green space. I am pleased to help to secure federal funds to add 8,000 acres to the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge making it one of the largest areas in the Mid-Atlantic dedicated to land-wildlife research. The Refuge has grown from the original 2,670 acres to its present size of 12,750 acres since it was established in 1936. I have also worked to expand Piscataway Park which protects parklands along the Maryland shore to keep the river view from Mount Vernon looking the same as it did when President George Washington lived there, and helped acquire 6,000 acres in Charles County for the Douglas Point Project.

"I also believe that teaching our young people about preserving our natural resources is critically important to ensuring the future health of our environment. I am pleased that I have been able to secure federal funds to support the Alice Ferguson Foundation/Hard Bargain Farm Environmental Center in Accokeek that teaches environmental education and preservation to more than 10,000 students per year by introducing students to the ecology and geography of the Potomac River, and increasing the knowledge and comfort level of teachers in science and environmental education.

"Earth Day's call to action reminds us that, as a community, we can influence the quality of our water and air, the beauty of our local stream or woods, and the richness of our recreational surroundings. And, that environmental protection does not have to come at the expense of economic opportunities and job creation, encouraging new small business entrepreneurship and assuring the future of our long-standing business, farming and service industries. Today we celebrate the volunteers, residents, community groups and environmental organizations who remain committed to protecting our environment. However, Earth Day is also a critical reminder to look ahead to new environmental goals and make appropriate investments to see those goals accomplished.

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